

From the Desk of Karen McGagin

My thoughts are with all of the victims and families affected by the January 26 train derailment in Glendale. The Board joined forces with the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to help the Los Angeles County Victim Witness Assistance Center, the Ventura County Victim Witness Assistance Center, and other local victim advocates as soon as it became apparent that the derailment was the result of a criminal action. Mass casualty protocols jointly developed by OES and the Board were activated to facilitate decision-making and communication. On behalf of the Board and everyone who works here, I want to extend condolences to all those who lost someone in this tragic event, and our very best wishes to those who are recovering from the trauma.



Karen McGagin

This month we also begin to mark two important anniversaries in the field of victim services. Throughout 2005 the California Victim Compensation Program will commemorate its 40th anniversary. This year is also the 25th anniversary of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, promoting the theme that, "Justice Isn't Served Until Crime Victims Are."

The California Program is the oldest in the nation. This anniversary will give the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board (Board) a chance both to look back at the great strides made since 1965 in helping victims and to look forward to the future.

We are making exciting plans in observance of these two milestones. We also look forward to hearing about any plans your office or community has made to show support during Victims' Rights Week.

Karen McGagin
Executive Officer

Board Mourns Two Employees

In December the Board suffered the loss of two well-loved staff members: Pamela Harris in the Government Claims Program and Georgia Pinola in the Revenue Recovery and Accounting Division.

Pamela Harris lost her long and courageous battle against breast cancer on December 21, 2004. An office technician in the Board's Government Claims Division, she died at home at the age of 48. Pam began her career with the state service in 1995, joining the Board in 2001. Throughout her illness, Pam's sense of humor and good spirits were an inspiration to all those who knew her. Pam is greatly missed by the Board.

Georgia Pinola passed away peacefully on December 23, 2004. A restitution analyst in the Board's Revenue Recovery and Accounting Division, she died at home at the age of 56. Georgia had more than 31 years of state service, joining the Board in 1999. Georgia was witty, strong-willed, and independent. The youngest of 12 siblings, she is survived by her mother, daughters, Aimee and Tonie, and 9-month-old grandson, Dylan. Board staff will miss her dearly.

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Board Marks Two Important Anniversaries in 2005

This year marks two important milestones in the field of victim services. The Victim Compensation Program was created 40 years ago, and this year is the 25th anniversary of National Victims' Rights Week.

First in the Nation

The California Victim Compensation Program was the first of its kind in the nation in 1965. In a letter to then Governor Edmund G. Brown, State Sen. Eugene McAteer made a convincing case for a new program when he said, "The State of California spends millions of dollars for the maintenance of prisoners in penal institutions and the furnishing of dental and medical care, while the victimized persons and their families must bear any medical or dental expenses on their own and may suffer addition economic hardship from temporary or even permanent loss of employment." With the passage of McAteer's bill, SB 1057, the California Victim Compensation Program was born.

Today, compensating victims of violent crime is a well-established practice across the United States, with California still leading the way. Since 1965, California has awarded more than \$1 billion to help crime victims. During the Fiscal Year 2003-2004 alone, almost 50,000 people sought help through compensation, and awards totaled \$67 million.

25 Years for Victims' Rights Week

President Ronald Reagan declared the first National Crime Victims' Rights Week in 1981. During the week of April 10 to 16, 2005, the Silver Anniversary of National Victims' Rights Week will be observed across our nation by victims, survivors, and the professionals and volunteers who assist them. This year's theme, "Justice Isn't Served Until Crime Victims Are," emphasizes the importance of providing support and assistance to victims as a critical and core component of justice in America.



In California, the 16th Annual Victims' March will take place on Tuesday, April 12, on the west steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento. Photographs of loved ones lost to violent crimes will be on display at the event. The ceremony will begin at 11:45 a.m., with lunch immediately following at 1 p.m. on the Capitol grounds. Board staff will participate in a march from the 630 K Street to the ceremony at the Capitol. For more information, to reserve a display table, order lunch tickets, or to submit a photograph, contact Debbie Rollins at the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) at 1-800-821-6443, Ext. 239.

Help Us Fill in Our Victims' Rights Week Calendar and Our Timeline

We'd like to hear about any activities your organization is planning for Victims' Rights Week. Please contact the Public Affairs and Communications Section at 916-324-0400 or send an email to info@vcgcb.ca.gov about events you have scheduled. We would also like fill in our timeline describing the history of victims' rights and services in California. If you are aware of organizations or events that we should add, let us know! We will continue the timeline in the next issue of the Victim Compensation Connection.

1965: California establishes the first victim Compensation Program in the nation, third in the world.

1971: Bay Area Women Against Rape is founded, one of the first three victim assistance organizations in the nation.

1972: Haven House in Pasadena becomes the first victim assistance program in the nation to receive federal funds to help battered women.

1974: The Alameda County District Attorney's Office institutes the first Victim Witness Assistance Program in California, just the eighth in the nation.

1976: James Rowland, Fresno County Chief Probation Officer, develops the first Victim Impact Statement.

1980: Candy Lightner of Fair Oaks, California, co-founds Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) after the death of her daughter, Cari.

1982: The people of California enact Proposition 8, the Crime Victims' Bill of Rights

1982: Californian Lois Haight, now a Superior Court Judge in Contra Costa County, chairs the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime. Its groundbreaking report sets the agenda for victim rights and services in the United States.

1984: Cal State Fresno initiates the first victim services certificate program offered for academic credit by a university.

California leads the way



Front Row from Left: Jan Gardner, Laura Rodriguez, Cheryl Martin (VW Director), Maria Ochoa-Flynn and Yvette Alexander. Back Row from Left to Right: Joy Allison (Claims Unit Supervisor), Karen Leite, Valerie Thompson, Sylvia Avon, Deanna Dinicola, Ellen Ennis, Teresa Wyatt-Trujillo and Loretta Smith.

Riverside County Helps Victims When Crime Strikes

This month we turn the spotlight on Riverside County's Joint Powers (JP) Verification Unit. In Fiscal Year 2003-2004, 2,336 crime victims applied for compensation in Riverside County, an increase of 5.9 percent over FY 2002-2003. More than \$2.6 million in compensation benefits went to victims in the county. Riverside County's JP Unit is located within the District Attorney Office's Victim Witness Assistance Center. According to the new Victim Witness Director, Cheryl "Sherry" Martin, "These unsung heroes have over 94 years of claims experience between them and process an average of \$3.5 million a year that is paid, through the State Victim Compensation Program, to victims and providers in the area."

Sherry Martin replaces Martha Crawford, who ran the Victim Witness Assistance Center for 23 years, during which time staff grew from just a handful to 52 employees with offices in Blythe, Indio, Banning, Temecula, Corona and Riverside. The 12 JP Unit staff members process claims to reimburse victims and their families for crime-related losses, such as funeral or burial expenses, medical or dental treatment, mental health counseling, income loss, support loss, and relocation. The advocates in the Victim Witness Assistance Center help victims apply for the Victim Compensation Program and submit the applications to the JP Unit for verification and payment. The JP Unit staff work together with the advocates to help victims apply for and attain emergency awards for funeral arrangements or emergency relocations.

Joy Allison, supervising Victim Witness Claims Technician, says her JP staff is "a wonderful group of people to work with. We process most claims and bills within 30 days. We also process claims for Imperial County. Our office has also assisted other counties throughout the state when needed. The real benefit of having a JP Unit is that staff is local and has established good working relationships with providers and law enforcement agencies within our community."

Typical duties of the JP staff include reviewing the victim compensation application and crime report to determine Program eligibility and verifying the costs for bills. They work with the victim's insurance company or public benefit programs to make sure that the victim gets the best help possible.

The Victim Witness Assistance Center staff, including the JP Unit, recently collected used cellular phones for recycling by Verizon Wireless. Verizon in turn donated the phones to victims, programmed only for calls to victim witness advocates and emergency services. During Victims' Rights Week last year, staff gathered with victims on the steps of the Riverside courthouse to show their support.

For more information you can contact the Riverside County Victim Witness Assistance Center at 951-955-5450, or find them on the Internet at <http://www.riversideda.com/victim.html>.

Bilingual Services Program

Providing excellent customer service includes communicating effectively with our clients. The Board's Bilingual Services Program was created to do just that. Currently, bilingual assistance is from staff members who speak Spanish, Russian, and Farsi. The Bilingual Services Program includes a Bilingual Services Coordinator, 13 certified Spanish-speaking staff, and three Farsi and Russian speaking staff. The Board also has a contract with a service that provides telephone interpreters and written translation in many other languages.

During the past year, the Bilingual Services Program created a daily bilingual rotation to assist the Customer Service Unit with Spanish incoming calls; translated Victim Compensation Program letters and brochures into Spanish; created a guide to helping clients who do not speak English; and developed a handbook and script for staff to use. Teresa Green is the Bilingual Services Coordinator. She can be reached at (916) 327-4961.

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CDC Increases Collections

On January 1, the percentage collected from inmate trust accounts by the California Department of Corrections (CDC) for the Restitution Fund increased from 30 percent to 40 percent of each inmate's account balance. The CDC garnishes the funds from each inmate's account every month to help satisfy the amount the inmate owes in restitution fines and orders. The increase could result in an additional \$3 million a year in the Restitution Fund. In 2007, a final increase will bring the inmate trust account garnishment to 50 percent.

The first increase in years occurred on July 1, 2003 when the percentage increased from 20 percent to 30 percent. That increase was projected to generate an additional \$4 million a year for the Restitution Fund and, indeed, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003-04, collections increased to \$12 million from about \$8 million the year before.

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